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SUBJECT: SWEDEN ON MARCH GAERC AND GYMNICH

Classified By: Political Counselor Marc Koehler for reasons 1.4 (B) & (D).

1. (C) On March 10, Poloff discussed the March GAERC and GYMNICH with EU Deputy Correspondent Jonas Wendel; on March 6, POL Counselor met separately with EU Correspondent Magnus Scholdtz. Their comments follow:

General Affairs Session: Afghanistan, Chad, Ireland

-- On Afghanistan, Council Secretariat conclusions calling for increased EU engagement supporting the election process will be presented as an "A" point. Because the EU 27 need to be "fully calibrated" before issuing any declaration at the March 19-20 European Council, Afghanistan might appear also as a "false B item" to allow for a short discussion.

-- The Council Secretariat and Commission were both tasked with producing options for addressing the problem of recruiting civil servants for the EUPOL Mission. HighRep Solana was "very forceful" with member states on the need to produce personnel for EUPOL. A number of different Working Groups are currently looking at incentive packages for civilian personnel, focusing on improving per diems and working conditions to make Afghanistan attractive.

-- The EU still is undecided on whether to expand the mandate of EU Special Representative Ettore Sequi to match that of Ambassador Holbrooke, that is, to explicitly include Pakistan. Scholdtz noted that Sequi's mandate is not explicitly limited to Afghanistan, but that it would be better to clearly articulate his regional responsibility. Scholdtz also discussed the possibility of "double-hatting" Sequi as both special representative and head of the European Commission delegation in Kabul. Sweden favors double-hatting him so that he will have the Commission at his disposal.

-- On Chad and the Central African Republic, the EU will also make a statement on the planned transition from the EUFOR mission to the UN mission, MINURCAT. The EUFOR mandate expires March 15. The EU will not reduce involvement with the hand-over; Sweden does not currently contribute.

-- Preparations for the March 19-20 European Council meeting will also include discussion of the Irish referendum. At the next COREPER, Ireland will give an update on its preparations for the referendum.

External Relations Session: Belarus, Balkans, Bashir

-- On Belarus, the EU likely will extend the suspension of traveling sanctions for another six months. Sweden has seen some positive developments in Belarus from the October

sanctions suspension: increased social tolerance, release of dissidents, and the registration of a new, large political party. If the Belarusian Parliament recognizes Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the EU will have to "rethink the whole policy towards Belarus" said Wendel; Scholdtz noted Sweden would have "real trouble" with such a move by Lukashenko. The suspension of sanctions would legally permit President Lukashenko to attend the May 7 launch of the Eastern Partnership, but he has not yet been invited. Wendel said the "over-focus" on Belarus is "uncomfortable" for the Czechs, who will likely try to push further discussion to the GYMNICH.

-- On Montenegrin EU accession, Scholdtz noted reluctance from two member states (Netherlands, which has "enlargement fatigue," and Germany, which fears opening up its borders to other workers from the Western Balkans). He said Sweden shares the analysis that Montenegro will not be ready for EU accession in the near future, Scholdtz stated that it is still important for the Commission to put forward an avis at this time. Wendel said some member states want to treat the Western Balkans as a group regarding accession. EU consensus is "unlikely" said Wendel, and the Czechs might push further discussion to the GYMNICH.

-- Discussion of Bosnia and Herzegovina will focus on ways to strengthen EU presence in BiH; prolonging the ALTHEA mission and fine-tuning its mandate; and double-hatting the EU Special Representative as both representative and head of the EU mission. Sweden supports the Austrian candidate Inzko, but wants the decision to be made with Washington and Moscow.

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-- Macedonia was removed from the agenda; the EU might issue a statement after the March 22 elections. Moldova was also taken off the agenda.

-- On Sudan, the Czech presidency just issued a statement on the ICC arrest warrant, so further discussion is unlikely, according to Wendel. Scholdtz predicted that the evolving EU position would be very heavily influenced by what the U.S. says and does.

GYMNICH -- Middle East

-- On March 15, the Troika will meet with Egypt and the Palestinian Authority to receive an update on the Israeli-Palestinian talks. Egypt requested the meeting, but Jordan declined the invitation. The Swedes will not participate, Wendel said.

12. (U) Post will follow up on GYMNICH topics involving Iran and the Middle East with MFA Middle East experts later this week and report septel.
SILVERMAN